

News Release

Dan Svedarsky, U of M Wildlife Biologist Participates in Grasslands Conference in Kansas

By Itollefs on Wednesday, August 21, 2013

Dan Svedarsky was an invited speaker and conference co-summarizer at a recent conference



on, America's Grasslands: The Future of Grasslands in a Changing Landscape. Svedarsky is a research biologist at the Northwest Research and Outreach Center and director of the University of Minnesota, Crookston's Center for Sustainability. The meeting brought together researchers, natural resources professionals, farmers and ranchers, representatives of Native American tribes, and policy experts and conservationists from California to Washington, D.C. to discuss the outlook and opportunities to conserve North America's grasslands.

The biennial conference was held in Manhattan, Kan., and was focused on working collaboratively with ranchers to conserve grasslands but also included presentations on prairie ecology, interpretation, and restoration techniques. Primary sponsors of the conference were the National Wildlife Federation and Kansas State University along with the World Wildlife Fund, Environmental Defense Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Sharp Brothers Seed Company, Grassland Heritage Foundation, and the Consortium for Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability.

In his paper entitled, *Prairie restoration - up close and personal - on a University Campus*, Svedarsky reported on his long-time work with restoring prairie at the Red River Valley Natural History Area of the Northwest Research and Outreach Center in Crookston and the use of prairie plants in interpretative demonstrations on the Crookston campus.

He and other faculty, staff, and students have installed prairie plants in the Nature Nook, Youngquist Prairie Garden, and currently in a raingarden in front of Heritage Hall; the newest resident hall on the Crookston campus. "Prairie plants have the advantage of being adapted to local growing conditions, are readily available, low maintenance, and are the "architects" of the rich fertile soils of the Red River Valley," notes Svedarsky. A number of UMC natural resource graduates are currently employed in land management capacities where they use prairie plants in their work. Svedarsky has also worked closely with The Nature Conservancy in northwest Minnesota in projects such as the Pankratz Prairie, Pembina Trail Preserve, and the Glacial Ridge Project. He received the President's Stewardship Award from The Nature Conservancy in 1981.

Over 250 participants attended the conference which included field trips to the Konza Prairie Biological Station of Kansas State and the National Tall Grass Prairie Preserve. The regional setting was the Flint Hills region of the North American Tallgrass Prairie where limestone geology lies close to the surface thus favoring grassland development on the thin soils and a ranching culture. Kansas State has been the center of numerous research studies on tallgrass prairie ecology including vegetation and animal interactions including the Greater Prairie Chicken.

"Native grasslands and the wildlife that depend on them are disappearing at alarming rates," said Aviva Glaser, agriculture policy specialist at the National Wildlife Federation and conference co-organizer. Recent surges in grain prices have prompted the extensive conversion of native grasslands and CRP grasslands in the Dakotas, many of which are erosion-prone due to steep slopes and droughty soils. "We want to do what we can to help the conservation and careful management of the American grassland," said Dr. John Briggs, Kansas State professor of biology and director of the Konza Prairie Biological Station who also helped organize the conference. "It's going to take all of these groups working together. We can't just work in a vacuum."

In his summary remarks, Svedarsky posed the question of why people should care about prairies in the first place, with their rich diversity of plants and animals; large and small. "I think often of the following words of Larry Kruckenberg, former North Dakota Game and Fish Commissioner: for people to care about something, they must; feel it is of consequence, believe that it affects them, and believe they can do something about it. Does an unemployed single mom in the Bronx care about the conversion of South Dakota grassland to row crops? I doubt it, but before real consequential action is taken at the regional and national level, the base of caring constituency must be broadened."

Svedarsky believes in educational solutions and also quoted the Central African Conservationist, Baba Dioum. "For in the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught." Being a college natural resources conservation professor, Svedarsky adds to this his mantra for teaching, "So let us teach often, and well." Today the University of Minnesota Crookston delivers 28 bachelor's degree programs, 20 minors, and 39 concentrations on campus--as well as 11 degrees online--in the areas of agriculture and natural resources; business; liberal arts and education; and math, science and technology. With an enrollment of 1,800 undergraduates from 25 countries and 40 states, the Crookston campus offers a supportive, close-knit atmosphere that leads to a prestigious University of Minnesota degree. "Small Campus. Big Degree." To learn more, visit www.umcrookston.edu.

In the photo: Dan Svedarsky by a raingarden of mostly native prairie plants in front of the Flint Hills Discovery Center in Manhattan, Kansas. Svedarsky and assistants are installing a similar raingarden in front of Heritage Hall on the University of Minnesota Crookston campus.

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